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# A TRUE STORY OF A LIVE-WIRE READING CONTEST

**Answers the Question:**

**"How Can Women Spread the Gospel of Christian Stewardship?"**

Interchurch World Movement
of North America
45 West 18th Street New York City

## NOTICE

THE plan outlined in this pamphlet is merely suggestive. In some places it may need to be modified and adapted; especially is this true of the list of pamphlets herein given. Other suitable literature can be obtained at your own denominational headquarters, if preferred.

The contest should be started as soon as possible in order to prepare the way for an early Stewardship Acknowledgment Day in your church.

A descriptive price list of Interchurch stewardship literature, including other pamphlets besides those in the "Reading Contest Packet" may be had on application to the Women's Activities Department, Interchurch World Movement, 45 West 18th Street, New York City.

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## I. MAKING A STIR

"I NEVER heard of anything like it," exclaimed Mary Ward. "Everybody's reading, and if they aren't reading, they're talking about it. And if they're not talking about it, they're coming 'round on the quiet to find out what's going on."

"It's the same old story, Mary," said Mrs. Cadman. "Given one of God's big truths, plus a good plan of going to work, plus a half-dozen determined women—and something surely will happen."

"Your're right, dear. But I must tell you about Elizabeth Elliott. What do you think! She called me up on the telephone—it was the fiftieth time it had rung that evening—and asked me in a mysterious manner if I was 'at home.' You remember she flatly refused to help us in the beginning.

Well, I almost told her I wasn't 'at home,' but I finally relented and she ran over in a few minutes. She whispered to me, 'Can't you sneak me a book? Everybody else is reading, and I just have to know what they're talking about.'"

"I hope you gave her what she wanted," laughed Mrs. Cadman.

"And there's my neighbor, Mrs. James," continued Mary. "At the very beginning she said that she didn't believe in mixing up money and religion."

"How in the world did she connect a reading contest with money?"

"She didn't, but her husband did. He told her that all this excitement was finally to get people to give more money to the church. And so yesterday, after she had been talking with her husband, she came to ask me if, in case she decided to become a tither, she could use her tithe to buy new shades for her stepmother."

"Well, what did you say to that?" asked Mrs. Cadman.

"Oh, that's easy. I told her that she'd better decide for herself after she'd read the books. And you know, she is actually reading them. And when I met her this morning, she said, almost shyly, that she had found an answer to her question. And there are a lot more just like her. I really didn't expect that a reading contest would make such a stir."

## II. HOW IT STARTED

MRS. CADMAN, the Stewardship Secretary of the Missionary Society, had been much concerned at her slow progress in bringing others to experience the joy and satisfaction of setting apart for the Lord's work a definite proportion of income.

"It has been so truly a means of grace to me," she often said; "and it is so closely related to the coming of the kingdom, that I wish all women would practise it."

So it happened that a plan finally suggested itself.

"It's a reading contest," she confided to her friend, Mary Ward. "Everybody's interested in a contest. We could divide the women into groups, with a captain over each group; select some interesting pamphlets or books; give points for each one read; end up with some kind of a meeting or jubilation; and so get a lot of people to know what stewardship is about."

Mary broke in with another thought. "I believe it's providential. You know the pastor has just finished dividing the parish up into groups of families. That will save us some work at the start. It ought not to be difficult to find a woman to captain each group. When shall we begin?"

"Just as soon as we can get the cooperation of the president of our two missionary societies, talk it over with the pastor, and get our plans into shape," said Mrs. Cadman. Then after a moment, looking sharply at her friend, she continued enthusiastically, "The big thing, and the first thing to find, is a general director, and that will be you."

"Never!" exclaimed Mary. "I am not adapted to that kind of work. I haven't the time; I never could organize folks."

Nevertheless, before the week was over the plans were made, and Mary Ward was organizing her group leaders. The reading contest had started with a bang.

Sounds easy! Yes, but it needed grace and inspiration. One member hesitated, but finally said that she would be a leader of a team, even though it meant giving up buying a new hat for Sunday.

Mary Ward's dearest friend, Elizabeth Elliott, on whom Mary depended to be her first leader, flatly refused. "It would sever our friendship!" exclaimed Elizabeth. "Don't ask me, I never could do it. Let's forget it."

It was different with Grace Winthrop. She also refused, although with reluctance. "I can't do it, Mary," said she. "Fancy me leading a team of women." At sight of Mary's disappointed face she added, "I do hate to refuse you."

But Mary had an idea. "I know what you can do. You paint so beautifully. You can make us the chart. Will you do that?"

"Oh; I certainly will. And I'll make a beauty, too."

## III. RULES OF THE GAME

IT was agreed to begin the next Sunday, and continue for four weeks. Lists of teams and leaders were posted on bulletins. Each leader took a list of her group and, following the mid-week prayer meeting, held an informal class for instruction in the rules. The purpose and plan of the contest were made public, and the chart which Grace Winthrop had made was used as a bulletin to indicate credits won. The assistant to the team leader reported weekly to the general director the winning of points by her team. Enthusiasm ran high as the bulletin announced the score of the different teams.

The leaders had already prepared the following list of literature, and sug-

gested crediting the number of points indicated after each title.

*Text Book*

"The New Christian" (*Cushman*).....(paper) 50 points

*Pamphlets*

"The New Emphasis"..... 10 points
"The Stewardship of Money" (*F. B. Meyer*).. 10 points
"The Church Treasurer Who Got Mad"..... 5 points
"The Jarring of Jacob Shapleigh"..... 5 points
"Thanksgiving Ann"..... 10 points
"Proportionate Giving" (*R. E. Speer*)..... 10 points

This Reading Contest Packet containing the literature named may be had for 35 cents (cash with the order) per packet, post paid, on application.

Order "Reading Contest Packet" from Interchurch World Movement, 45 West 18th Street, New York City.

Credits were to be awarded on the honor statement of the reader. If she secured the reading of any book or pamphlet by others than those enrolled in the classes, she should have double credit. All the team leaders were supplied with the literature on the same day.

## IV. WHAT HAPPENED

COMMUTING members were discovered on the trains going to New York, reading "Thanksgiving Ann" and "The New Christian" instead of the New York "Scream" or the Daily "Eagle."

One little girl became so engrossed in "Thanksgiving Ann" that she begged to be allowed to take it to school. The result was that the teacher read the little story aloud to the whole class.

Fathers and brothers began to inquire what was so absorbing; the telephone of the contest director rang as steadily as a bell-buoy in a fog, announcing additions to the contestants, points gained, or a convert to stewardship.

As soon as the women began to discuss tithing-stewardship for themselves, certain difficulties came to light. For example, many women are quite unused to bookkeeping, and so find it difficult to determine what their tithe would be. Again, here is a woman whose husband is liberality itself in the matter of charge accounts, but he does not see the propriety of giving his wife money to handle. How can she tithe? Indeed, how can any woman become a tithing steward, though married! Yet the women found answers

in the course of their stewardship reading contest.

Two little boys, standing wistful-eyed before the bulletin board one Sunday, confessed, after some coaxing, that since they had done all the required reading, they expected to see their names on the roll of honor. The children were assured that, even though their names did not appear on the bulletin, they should have seats of honor at the Pot-luck Supper to be held at the close of the contest.

Perhaps the greatest surprise of all came when Mary Ward's friend, Elizabeth Elliott, who had declared she never could do the reading, calmly rose in prayer meeting and said emphatically that every one ought to own the stewardship books. Moreover, she confessed that she had been indifferent at the beginning, but that for her the contest in reading had been a conquest for stewardship. "I did not know that stewardship was like this," she said earnestly. "It is not stewardship only; it is the real Christian life itself."

## V. CLOSING THE CONTEST

This is the story of what actually happened at the Summit church. New life and fresh inspiration had come with the inrush of enthusiasm for the stewardship idea. As a result five hundred readers were reported, and thirty-five signed the cards as Christian Stewards. An every-member canvass was to follow when others would undoubtedly be ready to make a definite decision as to offerings of time, service and resources for the kingdom.

The complete results cannot be tabulated in figures. Every church following such a plan will not only contribute to the membership of the Ten Million League of Christian Stewards, but will add conviction to the principle that putting God first and abiding in his promises will always assure the highest kind of prosperity.